

Emerson and Vedanta

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PREFACE

The lectures contained in these pages were delivered at The Vedanta Centre of Boston and later published in its magazine, "The Message of the East." The keen interest which they aroused has led us to reprint them in more convenient form. A new chapter on "Emerson and Hindu Classics" has been added which will prove valuable to the scholar and student of comparative philosophy.

The purpose of the lectures was to set forth the striking similarity between the writings of Emerson and the sacred teachings of the East—pre-eminently those of India. Deep students of Vedic ideals have

long regarded Emerson as an inspired interpreter of these ideals to the West; and there can be no doubt that as one turns the pages of his numerous essays and follows the exalted trend of his words, one can almost imagine that they fall upon the ears from some far Himalayan height.

It has always been one of the chief aims of the present author to show the fundamental harmony underlying all phases of higher thought, and this volume is one more effort towards the same end.

EDITOR.

CONTENTS

I. EMERSON AND VEDANTA	- - - -	11
II. KARMA AND COMPENSATION	- - - -	28
III. ATMAN AND OVER-SOUL	- - - -	46
IV. EMERSON AND HINDU CLASSICS	- - - -	67

"It is not to Israel alone that God has spoken and revealed His will; nor even only to recognized prophets, whether in Israel or among the nations. But to all who have his work to do He speaks, much or little, clearly or in parables and visions, according to their needs and according to their fitness to hear and understand."

—WISDOM OF ISRAEL.

LET HIM SPEAK*

Let him speak whose spirit flows like the river in
flood-time, full and strong;
Let others keep silent.
The tongue that speaketh soulless words
But scattereth pebbles before hungry mouths.
I keep still; do Thou speak.
For Thou alone canst speak to my soul.

* This is one of the author's latest poems.

I

EMERSON AND VEDANTA

“**I**F what philosophers say of the kinship between God and man be true, what has any one to do but, like Socrates, when he is asked what countryman he is, never to say that he is a citizen of Athens or Corinth, but of the world? . . . Why may not he who understands the administration of the world and has learned that the greatest and most principal and comprehensive of all things is this system composed of men and God; and that from Him the seeds of being are descended, not only to my father and grandfather, but to all things that are produced and born on earth, and especially

to rational natures, as they alone are qualified to partake of communion with the Deity, being connected with Him by understanding: why may not such a one call himself a citizen of the world? Why not a son of God?" These words of the Roman philosopher Epictetus show how all truly great men possess a universal philosophy of life; and how natural it is for them to transcend the limitations of locality, race and creed, and break down all barriers of apparent difference.

This is essentially true of Emerson. You may go to the Far East—to India, Persia or China—and you will find a volume or two of his essays there where you would least expect to find them; and you will meet people who accept Emerson's writings, not only with sympathy, but as their own, because they recognize in them a real kinship of thought and ideals. There can be no doubt that Emerson was deeply in-

terested in Eastern philosophy. In his writings we find many direct and indirect references to Oriental teachings. He was a devout student of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads, and often quoted or used stories from them.

Yet this does not mean that Emerson borrowed. I believe that there cannot be any borrowing in the higher realms of knowledge. There we cannot take what does **not belong** to us. We can borrow relative knowledge, but true knowledge can never be borrowed. It must rise up from the innermost recesses of our being. We must possess the power to recognize and assimilate it. Emerson was by no means the only one of his generation to study Oriental literature. Others read it, but they were unable to find in it what he did, because their prejudices and their lack of understanding made it impossible for them to grasp its true import. A gentle-

man once said to Emerson that he had studied all the different philosophies and religions of the world, and he was now convinced that Christianity was the only one; to which Emerson replied: "That only shows, my friend, how narrowly you have read them." Unless we have openness of mind and a certain depth of spiritual consciousness, we may come in contact with many lofty ideals, but they will make no definite impression on us. We may try to borrow them, but we cannot retain them or use them intelligently until we have made them our own. When the higher light of understanding comes, we find that there is no need to borrow, because all men have equal access to what is cosmic. As Emerson has said:

"There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is

made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent." "Of the universal mind each individual is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him." "So all that is said of the wise man by Stoic or Oriental or modern essayist, describes to each reader his own idea, describes his unattained but attainable self." "How easily these old worships of Moses, of Zoroaster, of Manu, of Socrates, domesticate themselves in the mind. I cannot find any antiquity in them: they are mine as much as theirs."

This idea of the universal mind brings before us forcibly the great fundamental truth of the Vedas,—*Ekam-eva-dvityam*, "Spirit is one without a second." Out of

that one essence the whole universe has evolved and in that one it rests. As it is said in the Yajur-Veda: "The Absolute, though one, is conceived as many; countless luminaries become one in Him; all the Vedas (Scriptures) become one in Him; all sacred rites become one in Him. He abides equally in the soul of all existing things; He is the Inner Self of all beings, seated in the heart of every living creature; He is the Ruler of all creatures, and all beings become one in Him."

When Emerson gave expression to these ideas which were not strictly orthodox from the Christian point of view, he did not meet with a sympathetic welcome. He even had to resign his pulpit, as we know; but this did not make him give up his convictions, which proves his true greatness. Whenever a man is willing to make compromises and limit his beliefs through fear of public opinion, we may know that

he lacks true spirituality. But Emerson was not merely a popular preacher or a scholar, he was a spiritual genius. He had a wider vision. He struck a note that was both spiritual and universal. He writes in his essay on *Circles*: "I thought as I walked in the woods and mused on my friends, why should I play with them this game of idolatry? I know and see too well, when not voluntarily blind, the speedy limits of persons called high and worthy. O blessed Spirit, whom I forsake for these, they are not thou. Every personal consideration that we allow costs us heavenly state. We sell the thrones of angels for a short and turbulent pleasure."

This passage shows clearly his attitude of mind, how unwilling he was to give up what he believed to be true and what was the result of his long and deep reflection. "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think," he exclaims.

“This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”

Great souls sometimes seem very uncompromising because they are unwilling to sacrifice that which they believe to be vital. They necessarily have a different standard, and they cannot be untrue to that standard even though the whole world turn against them. As Emerson says: “The angels are so enamored of the language that is spoken in heaven that they will not distort their lips with the hissing

and unmusical dialects of men, but speak their own, whether there be any who understand it or not." Those who possess such courage of conviction are the only ones who really contribute towards the well-being of mankind.

Emerson more than once speaks of his debt to the Hindū Scriptures, and there can be no doubt that in his long study of them he found much to inspire him. In his essay on *Quotations and Originality* he says: "What divines had assumed as the distinctive revelations of Christianity, theologic criticism has matched by exact parallelisms from the Stoics and poets of Greece and Rome. Later when Confucius and the Indian Scriptures were made known, no claim to monopoly of ethical wisdom could be thought of." "It is only within this century that England and America discovered that their nurserytales were old German and Scandinavian

stories; and now it appears that they came from India, and are the property of all the nations descended from the Aryan race, and have been warbled and babbled between nurses and children for unknown thousands of years." Once more in *Persian Poetry* he writes: "The favor of the climate, making subsistence easy and encouraging an outdoor life, allows to the Eastern nations a highly intellectual organization,—leaving out of view at present the genius of the Hindoos (more Oriental in every sense), whom no people have surpassed in the grandeur of their ethical statement."

After reading these passages we cannot doubt that Emerson fully recognized the loftiness and beauty of the Eastern teaching. He also possessed an unusual grasp of Indian Philosophy and picked out here and there its fairest thoughts to mingle with his own. To-day it is easy to find

many translations of Oriental writings; but in his time the translations were few and imperfect; yet because he possessed the same quality of mind, he was able to draw out from them the essence. He was like the mythical Indian swan, which when it is given milk mixed with water, is able to separate the milk from the water and take only the milk.

Whenever we study in a superficial way, we do not touch the essence and the essence does not touch us. We all have the opportunity of coming in contact with great writings or great men, but they do not reach us. Sri Ramakrishna to illustrate this gives a parable of three dolls, one of salt, one of cloth and one of stone. When the salt doll went into the ocean, it at once became one with it; the cloth doll was wet through, but retained its own form; while the stone doll remained unchanged. So some people have such a

stony nature, nothing seems to make an impression on them. But we can all overcome this and make ourselves susceptible to higher ideals if we wish.

Vedanta insistently proclaims that there can be no boundary lines in the realm of thought; and above all it teaches that unless we can put aside our narrow prejudices and superstitions, we can never hope to attain the highest Truth. I use the word "superstition" because whenever we cling to a fixed idea or to certain forms and rituals merely because our forefathers believed in them or because they have become a habit with us, that is superstition. The central aim of Vedanta is to bring all to one unifying understanding, yet to let each one follow his own particular form of faith. When we try to force sameness of thought, it bars spiritual progress; but when we admit the possibility of perfect unity in variety, then each one is able

to advance in his own way. Vedanta realizes that as long as there are such differences in human temperament and mind, we cannot expect all to worship in the same manner. To destroy diversity in life would be to destroy much of its beauty and sublimity. Therefore Vedanta includes in its scope all forms of thought. It sees that even the crudest aspect of religious faith has its value, since it would not be possible for the ignorant man and the philosopher to have the same conception of Truth. Their aspiration may be equal, but their modes of expression must inevitably differ.

“Truth is one, men call it by various names and comprehend it in different ways!” Such was the profound discovery of Indo-Aryan sages as far back as in the Rig-Veda, several thousand years before the Christian era; and it has been the basis ever since for all the ethical and

spiritual ideals of India. These Seers realized that dualism, qualified non-dualism and monism did not represent rival phases of belief, but different degrees of spiritual development, each having special appeal for certain types of mind. It would be just as absurd to expect a person of rudimentary understanding to grasp the loftiest ideals of monism,—that there is but one Life, one Cosmic Principle, one Consciousness permeating the whole universe—as it would be to expect a child in the primary school to grasp the highest problems of astronomy. Yet in time we know that the child will grow to comprehend them if he perseveres.

Emerson makes this plain in his essay on *Immortality* when he writes: "Will you offer empires to such as cannot set a house or private affairs in order? Here are people who cannot dispose of a day; an hour hangs heavy on their hands; and will you

offer them rolling ages without end? But this is the way to rise. Within every man's thought is a higher thought,—within the character he exhibits today, a higher character. The youth puts off the illusions of the child, the man puts off the ignorance and tumultuous passions of youth; proceeding thence puts off the egotism of manhood, and becomes at last a public and universal soul. He is rising to greater heights, but also rising to realities; the outer relations and circumstances dying out, he entering deeper into God, God into him, until the last garment of egotism falls, and he is with God and shares the will and immensity of the First Cause.

“It is curious to find the selfsame feeling, that it is not immortality, but eternity,—not duration, but abandonment to the Highest, and so the sharing of His perfection—appearing in the farthest East

and West. The human mind takes no account of geography, language, or legends, but in all utters the same instinct."

Emerson's great openness, fairness and love of Truth enabled him to understand the teachings of all nations; and whenever he came across great truths, he recognized and absorbed them. When a man can thus perceive the highest in other men, it deals a death-blow to all littleness. In comparing Emerson's philosophy with the Vedic teaching there is no intention to belittle the genius of Emerson. The universal facts of life are the same in East and West, in the remotest past and the present. It was because Emerson had discovered certain profound truths in his own soul, that he was able to accept with delight the same truths when he discovered them elsewhere. Only a man who is an expert in the higher realms of knowledge, can analyze and appreciate the value of

ideas of rare quality when he finds them; and Emerson was able to do this. We are destined more and more to be thrown together, and I hope and pray that it may be the will of the Cosmic Being to destroy the fictitious barriers which exist between East and West, North and South; and enable us to meet in the one universal Truth. All great minds do this. They cannot be satisfied to live in little narrow holes of their own. They must expand; and as they expand, they leave behind them all sense of difference. Those who are able to abide in this unbroken unity become free souls and enjoy the supreme cosmic Bliss and Infinitude.

II

KARMA AND COMPENSATION

“**T**HOU canst not gather what thou dost not sow ; as thou dost plant the trees, so will it grow . . . Whatever the act a man commits, whatever his state of mind, of that the recompense must he receive in corresponding body.” These profound and dynamic words of wisdom spoken by Manu the great ancient law-giver of India, not only express the basic principle of the Vedic idea of Karma (law of compensation), but they contain the simple but irrevocable law of human destiny. For even in Nature we find constant proof of the truth and fairness of this law in every turn of life. For only

the rose will produce a rose and an apple-seed, an apple-tree. With same precision and exactness pure thought and kind deeds will produce unfailing happiness and their opposite will bring man misery. This is not an arbitrary law; it is a true, gentle, but firm and just principle of life. When we learn to abide by its beneficence our life produces in abundance the richness of human experience.

The idea of *Karma* is not regarded in India as a theological doctrine or as an intellectual speculation; it is considered to offer the only rational, logical and satisfactory explanation of all the perplexities and problems of human life. The word *Karma*, from the Sanskrit, literally means "action," that is, all that we think, all that we do, and also whatever is produced as the result of our thought and deed. It is not limited, however, to what we think and do in this life only; its scope extends to all the past

and all the future. The law must operate in both directions; because if what we are doing now is to determine our future condition, then there must have been some cause in the past for our present condition. There are many who believe in a future life, but who are unwilling to accept the idea of pre-existence; yet it requires little logic to see that if we exist in the future, then our present life must become pre-existence to that future life.

In India the idea of Karma is not a mere dogmatic belief; it is a fundamental law and corresponds to what modern science calls the law of cause and effect. It shows that there is no such thing as chance or injustice in human affairs; that all these inequalities which we see in the world are not ordained by an arbitrary Ruler, but are the inevitable results of our own mode of life and thought. This life, in Indian Scriptures, is called *Karma-bhumi*, the

harvest field of action; and according to the seeds we sow in it do we reap. It is evident that we cannot reap what we do not sow; hence what comes to us must be of our own planting. For the same reason people have no cause to be frightened by circumstances; for however overpowering and unalterable our present condition may seem, it can always be undone by the thoughts and actions which we sow to-day. Emerson gives a clear expression of this in his essay on *Compensation*.

“Ever since I was a boy,” he says, “I have wished to write a discourse on Compensation; for it seemed to me when very young that on this subject life was ahead of theology and the people knew more than the preachers taught. . . . It seemed to me also that in it might be shown a ray of divinity, the present action of the soul of this world, clean from all vestige of tradition; and so the heart of man

might be bathed by an inundation of eternal love, conversing with that which he knows was always and always must be, because it really is now. It appeared, moreover, that if this doctrine could be stated in terms with any resemblance to those bright instructions in which this truth is sometimes revealed to us, it would be a star in many dark hours and crooked passages in our journey, that would not suffer us to lose our way.

“I was lately confirmed in these desires by hearing a sermon at church. The preacher, a man esteemed for his orthodoxy, unfolded in the ordinary manner the doctrine of the Last Judgment. He assumed that judgment is not executed in this world; that the wicked are successful; that the good are miserable; and then urged from reason and from Scripture a compensation to be made to both parties in the next life. . . . What did the

preacher mean by saying that the good are miserable in the present life? Was it that house and lands, offices, wine, horses, dress, luxury, are had by unprincipled men, whilst the saints are poor and despised; and that a compensation is to be made to these last hereafter, by giving them like gratifications another day—bank stock and doubloons, venison and champagne? This must be the compensation intended; for what else? Is it that they are to have leave to pray and praise? to love and serve men? Why, that they can do now. The legitimate inference the disciple would draw was: ‘We are to have *such* a good time as the sinners have now,’ or to put it to its extreme import, ‘You sin now, we shall sin by and by; we would sin now, if we could; not being successful, we expect our revenge tomorrow.’

“The fallacy lay in the immense concession that the bad are successful; that

justice is not done now. The blindness of the preacher consisted in deferring to the base estimate of the market of what constitutes a manly success, instead of confronting and convicting the world from the truth; announcing the presence of the soul; the omnipotence of the will, and so establishing the standard of good and ill, of success and falsehood."

This is what we see in the world of ordinary consciousness, the world where everything is looked at and judged from the surface. When we analyze properly, however, we find that the whole standard here rests on a physical basis; but a complete explanation of life can never be found if we limit our vision to the surface only. So long as we merely perceive the effect and judge from that, we shall always see injustice and feel resentful. Emerson writes: "Every act rewards itself, or in other words, integrates itself, in a two-

fold manner; first, in the thing, or in real nature, and secondly in the circumstance, or in apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The causal retribution is in the thing and is seen by the soul. The retribution in the circumstance is seen by the understanding; it is inseparable from the thing, but is often spread over a long time and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes may follow late after the offense, but they follow because they accompany it. Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed."

This is absolutely in accordance with the Indian conception of Karma. The ef-

fect we see is nothing but the fruition of a seed of action. Whether or not any one keeps record of what we think or do, even in the dark, the seed we sow must bear fruit; just as a seed grows even when the gardener drops it unconsciously on the soil. It is not that an arbitrary will decrees that we be happy or unhappy. The world is governed by law and man cannot escape from that law. As soon as he understands this, he tries to put himself in harmony with it. "All things are double, one against another," Emerson writes. "Tit for tat; an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; blood for blood; measure for measure; love for love. Give and it shall be given you. He that watereth shall be watered himself. Thou shalt be paid exactly for what thou hast done, no more, no less. Who doth not work shall not eat. Curses always recoil on the head of him who imprecates them. If you put

a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own. . . . You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong." "Always pay; for first or last you must pay your entire debt. Persons and events may stand for a time between you and justice, but it is only a postponement. You must pay at last your own debt."

This is the law, but we often forget it in the turmoil of this world, as we live on the surface and see wrong and injustice apparently triumphant. If, however, we cling to this standard of life, we lose our moral stamina and make no headway. We should not do right merely because it will bring us a little satisfaction, but because it is the only way to live. When understanding becomes the guiding factor in our life, then we do our duty without thought of reward. Until we reach this attitude of mind, however, all our actions will create new bondage for us.

The only way we can be freed from the chain of action and reaction is by not caring for the result. But how can we work without thought of some result? What impetus shall we have? Actually if we put a price on our action, we limit the result by our own limitation and we deprive ourselves. If on the contrary we put no price whatever, but are willing to work for the sake of the work, the One who knows all things will bestow on us the greatest result. When a person gives to another or does for another with the lingering thought of gratitude or applause, this thought destroys the merit of the action. But when we can free our mind from the desire for personal gratification, we gain everything, yet we avoid the reaction.

The compensation must come. We do not have to ask for it. If our labor is worthy of any recompense, the law will

bring it to us. We cannot lose it. We are bound to get it. As Emerson puts it: "Human labor, through all its forms, from the sharpening of a stake to the construction of a city or an epic, is one immense illustration of the perfect compensation of the universe. The absolute balance of Give and Take, the doctrine that everything has its price, and if that price is not paid, not that thing but something else is obtained, and that it is impossible to get anything without its price, is not less sublime in the columns of a ledger than in the budgets of states, in the laws of light and darkness, in all the action and reaction of nature."

Sometimes this does not seem to be true, because we see people who reap results without apparent labor. Take, for example, a man of genius. He has not worked for his gift, he is born with it, he has it. But when we extend our vision back into the past, we find that his genius is not an ac-

cident. He has earned it, he has paid the price. He has worked for it at some time, and as the result of that labor the flower of genius has blossomed in this life. So with the child who is born miserable or unfortunate. That child has a soul, and that soul did not begin with this body. It has a past full of experiences which have moulded its present conditions. The man who blinds himself to these deeper facts, to him the whole universe is a mystery; and the more he tries to find an explanation, the more he becomes confused and relentless in his judgment.

“There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit, its own nature. The soul is not a compensation, but a life. The soul *is*. Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole.” “In

the nature of the soul is the compensation for the irregularities of condition. The radical tragedy of nature seems to be the distinction of More or Less. How can Less not feel the pain; how not feel indignation or malevolence towards More? Look at those who have less faculty and one feels sad and knows not well what to make of it. He almost shuns their eye; he fears they will upbraid God. What should they do? It seems a great injustice. But see the facts nearly and these mountainous inequalities vanish. Love reduces them as the sun melts the iceberg in the sea. The heart and soul of all men being one, this bitterness of *His* and *Mine* ceases. His is mine. I am my brother and my brother is me."

These words of Emerson remind us of a beautiful passage in the Isa-Upanishad: "He who beholds all beings in the Great Self and the Self in all beings, he never

turns away from It (the Self). He who perceives all beings as the Self, for him how can there be delusion or grief, when he sees oneness everywhere?" Sorrow, hatred, jealousy and all such base qualities cannot touch him. He is enveloped with one spirit only, the spirit of love. When the great understanding of the light of Truth shines in our heart, all these little feelings vanish; and in their place there is joy and love unbounded. "We are idolaters of the old," Emerson again declares. "We do not believe in the riches of the soul, in its proper eternity and omnipresence. We do not believe there is any force in to-day to rival or recreate that beautiful yesterday. We linger in the ruins of the old tent where once we had bread and shelter and organs, nor believe that the spirit can feed, cover and nerve us again. We cannot again find aught so dear, so sweet, so graceful. But we sit and weep

in vain. The voice of the Almighty saith, 'Up and onward for evermore!'

Man must rise; he must not grieve over his dead actions. He must go onward and forward, if he wishes to attain the realm of perfection. He must not linger in the ruins of the past. He must not cling to material conditions, which are ever-shifting. He must not base his happiness on this one little span of life. When the veil of death falls, he must not imagine that all is over, that his last opportunity is gone. Opportunities are never lacking, but we are not always ready to profit by them. The wisest thing for us is to make the best possible use of our present. We hamper our progress when we lay undue stress on the past or the future. If the present is well-lived, the future will take care of itself. But we must have wisdom and we must have strength. If we know the nature of the soul, and are imbued with these

bigger ideas, then we cannot do anything small.

We may make thousands of laws, but that will not check crime; we must lift the criminal by giving him understanding. If he knows that when he commits a crime, he hurts himself more than the one he tries to injure, he will not do it. When a man realizes that he is the maker of his own life, the maker of his own bondage; that he holds the key by which he can unlock the door and enter into the realms of lasting happiness; then it gives him a new impetus to go on and he is not tempted to do things which create bondage. Vedanta does not threaten the wrong-doer with the rod of punishment; it does not tell him that he is sinful or accursed. On the contrary, it sounds the dynamic note: "O child of Immortal Bliss, it does not befit thee to do these things which are of the world and unworthy."

Whatever we sow, whether consciously or unconsciously, must bear fruit; so we must become conscious beings. We must do more than just live somehow or other. Eating, sleeping, feeling pleasure and pain, these we have in common with the brute. If we limit our consciousness and aspiration to that narrow sphere, we are no better than the lower animals. We must lift our standard. We must not do only what benefits us here and now; we must benefit ourselves eternally. We must not merely think of this little self, we must work for our soul. When we can live with supreme understanding, as children of God; when we can lay all actions like flowers on the altar of God; then we shall escape from reactionary bondage, and all the actions we perform will lead us towards freedom even in this life.

III

ATMAN AND OVER-SOUL

WHETHER God and soul are myths or facts is a question which has been discussed in all ages by all the thinking minds of the world; and although sages and mystics have proved it by their own light, this cannot reveal it to others who have not the same light. "Every man's words who speaks from that life must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part," Emerson writes. "I dare not speak for it. My words do not carry its august sense; they fall short and cold. Only itself can inspire whom it will, and behold! their speech shall be lyrical and sweet, and universal as the rising of the wind." In

similar words Yama, the Lord of Death, speaks to Nachiketas in the Katha-Upanishad. "The *Atman* cannot be obtained by mere study of the Scriptures, nor by intellectual perception, nor by frequent hearing of It; he whom the Self chooses, by him alone is It attained. To him the Self reveals Its true nature. But he who has not turned away from evil conduct, whose senses are uncontrolled, who is not tranquil, whose mind is not at rest, he can never attain this Self even by knowledge." That is, unless a man lives the life and develops his higher spiritual faculties, mere intellectual knowledge cannot help him much. As Emerson says again:

"The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our be-

ing is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has not prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine. . . . We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime in man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty; to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One. And this deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object are one."

The ancient Vedic Scriptures abound in passages describing in almost identical terms the relation of the phenomenal world with the Unseen One, and the con-

nection of the soul with its origin—the One without a second. Nowhere does Vedanta deal with the universe as a combination of unrelated fragments ; it sees all things as parts of a great whole and it tries to bind all these parts together in that whole, yet without destroying the entity of each individual soul. Therefore, before we can define our relation with the world, we must discover our relation with its Source. That is, we must project our mind beyond this little span of self-consciousness and learn to know our real Self. In the philosophy of the Vedas we find a clear distinction made between what man calls his self and the Over-Soul ; the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman*, the individual self and the Supreme Self ; or between the apparent man and the real man.

Man is the reflection of God ; but the reflection cannot exist without the object reflected ; so man must know what God is,

if he would know himself. This has been the search down the ages and this search must be made by every individual for himself; there is no one who can answer this question for another. Because of this it ever remains a hidden mystery. It is true that certain philosophies and ethical systems, like the Buddhistic, drop the self entirely; but the self they drop is the man of name, form and limitations. And it is necessary to do this, because we can never be wholly possessor of our eternal being until we transcend the consciousness of mundane things.

What is the *Atman* or Self? In the Kena-Upanishad It is defined as "the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the life of the life, the eye of the eye. That which cannot be thought by mind, but by which mind is able to think; that which is not seen by the eye, but by which the eye is able to see; that

which cannot be heard by the ear, but by which the ear is able to hear." Emerson draws almost the same picture when he writes: "All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie, an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.

"A man is the façade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but mis-

represents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey.

“Of this pure nature every man is at some time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colors. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that all spiritual being is in man. A wise old proverb says, ‘God comes to see us without bell’; that is, as there is no

screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul, where man, the effect, ceases and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God. Justice we see and know, Love, Freedom, Power. These natures no man ever got above, but they tower over us, and most in the moment when our interests tempt us to wound them."

The eating, drinking, sleeping man thinks his whole life is contained in his physical being. His miseries to him are great realities; his hands and feet, his eyes, nose, these various bodily organs seem all-important; while he overlooks that by which he is living, acting and thinking. When we descend to this state of consciousness, we inevitably misrepresent ourselves. As soon as we forget our soul-

nature, we become selfish entities; we think that to find happiness we must deceive or override our fellow-men, and do everything for our own gain and gratification. But the real man within, who is majestic and free from all sense of competition and rivalry, turns away from fleeting mundane vanities, because he knows that his true being is of God.

“The influence of the senses has, in most men, overpowered the mind to that degree that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul.” “See how the deep divine thought reduces centuries and millenniums, and makes itself present through all ages. Is the teaching of Christ less effective now than it was when first his mouth was opened? The emphasis of

facts and persons in my thought has nothing to do with time. And so, always the soul's scale is one; the scale of the senses and the understanding is another. Before the revelations of the soul, time, space and Nature shrink away."

How like these words of Emerson is the passage in the Svetasvatara-Upanishad: "When the light of the Atman or Self has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence. For the sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings and much less this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light all this is lighted. He makes all. He knows all, the self-caused, the knower, the Time of time!" Spiritual verities can never be matters of tradition. We can never believe in things until we become acquainted with them through our own direct perception. No one can make us believe that

we have a soul until we become aware of it ourselves. Theoretical knowledge is not dependable knowledge. Even a small amount of knowledge based on direct apprehension is a far surer guide than the greatest amount of learning. Intellectual knowledge leads us into an ever-increasing tangle of diversity; while direct vision always simplifies and leads to fundamental unity. As Emerson again declares:

“The mind is one; and the best minds who love truth for its own sake, think much less of property in truth. They accept it thankfully everywhere, and do not label or stamp it with any man’s name, for it is theirs long beforehand, and from eternity. The learned and the studious of thought have no monopoly of wisdom. Their violence of direction in some degree disqualifies them to think truly. We owe many valuable observations to people who are not very acute or profound, and who

say the thing without effort, which we want and have long been hunting in vain. The action of the soul is oftener in that which is left unsaid than in that which is said in any conversation."

Here Emerson strikes the same universal note which sounds through all Vedic teaching, that Truth is not the exclusive property of any one group of people, but is the common property of the whole human race and equally open to all who can claim it. Whoever is open to Truth does not care from what source it comes. It is Truth, that is sufficient. He does not try to label it. If we love God above all things and seek to be united with Him, no divisions or distinctions can exist for us. The Lord abides equally in every heart and when we see Him there, all barriers of exclusiveness must fall. God is One, Truth is One, the Infinite Spirit is One. There is but one great family and God is the

presiding head of that family. Until we recognize this and feel in our hearts that He is our real Father or Mother, we cannot be fully open to the higher revelation.

Lofty spiritual Truth exists irrespective of time or place. It always stands there; and when people are ready to receive it, it unfolds itself to them. "We are wiser than we know," Emerson¹ says. "If we will not interfere with our thought, but will act entirely, or see how the thing stands in God, we know the particular thing, and every thing, and every man. For the maker of all things and all persons stands behind us and casts his dread omniscience through us over things."

Few possess a pure spiritual sense, and one who has it, because he speaks and acts differently from others, stands out from among men; and people interpret this peculiarity as insanity. Emerson speaks of this also. "A certain tendency to insanity,"

he writes, "has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as if they had been 'blasted with excess of light.' The trances of Socrates, the 'union' of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers, the illumination of Swedenborg, are of this kind. . . . Revelation is the disclosure of the soul. The popular notion of a revelation is that it is a telling of fortunes. In past oracles of the soul the understanding seeks to find answers to sensual questions and undertakes to tell from God how long men shall exist, what their hands shall do and who shall be their company, adding names and dates and places. But we must pick no locks. We must check this low curiosity."

When man seeks light, not for what it will bring him in the form of health, prosperity or success, but for itself, then alone

will it come. Only when love of the soul leads him upward and onward will he attain it. In no other way can he gain communion with the Eternal Spirit. At every step of life two paths confront us. One leads Godward; the other towards the world. The wise, distinguishing between the two, choose the Real and Eternal; while the ignorant, preferring that which brings immediate and tangible results, choose the lower path. The one moves inward, the other moves outward. "The Self-existent created the senses outgoing; for this reason man sees the external world, but not the inner Atman or Self. Some wise men, however, desiring immortality, with eyes turned away from the external, see the Great Self within."

Bearing out this statement of the Vedic Scriptures, Emerson says: "The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary—between poets like Herbert and poets

like Pope; between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Coleridge and philosophers like Locke, Mackintosh and Stewart; between men of the world who are reckoned accomplished talkers and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his thought—is that one class speaks *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact, and the other class *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons. It is no use to preach to me from without. I can do that easily for myself. Jesus speaks always from within and in a degree that transcends all others. In that is the miracle.”

The same attitude is to be found among the Indo-Aryans. Mere scholarship has never been considered by them an essential qualification for a spiritual teacher. He must be one who knows, who is directly

acquainted with the higher facts of life; not one who can fill the brain with theories about God. The real spiritual genius is not dependent on any outer support, his strength comes from the Fountainhead. If I go to a man who is only brilliant intellectually, he may satisfy me for a moment, but afterwards the mind seems more confused. If, on the contrary, I go to a man who has the light of higher understanding, he may perhaps speak only one word, but that word will prove to be a seed which will spring up and bear fruit. As Emerson puts it: "The tone of seeking is one and the tone of having is another." "If a man have not found his home in God, his manners, his form of speech, the turn of his sentences, the build, shall I say, of all his opinions will involuntarily confess it, let him brave it out how he will. If he have found his centre, the Deity will shine through him, through all the dis-

guises of ignorance, of ungenial temperament, of unfavorable circumstance."

The eternal Self, it is true, dwells in the heart of every mortal; but it is to be attained only in a state of consciousness where reason cannot reach. When, however, the mind is concentrated and turned within, then the mortal perceives the glory of the immortal Self and "rejoices, because he has obtained that which is the cause of all true joy," as it is said in the Katha-Upanishad. Emerson also writes; "Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable. It inspires awe and astonishment. When we have broken our god of tradition and ceased from our god of rhetoric, then may God fire the heart with his presence. It is the doubling

of the heart itself, nay, the infinite enlargement of the heart with a power of growth to a new infinity on every side." Also in the Upanishads we read: "The knower of Brahman (the Supreme) becomes like unto Brahman."

When a man enters the chamber of his soul, he may enter as a man, but he comes out transformed. A man cannot help going wrong and making mistakes as long as he is ignorant of his true nature. The only aid we can give him is to kindle in him the higher sense of the reality of God and his own soul. When he is able to perceive this, it will then not be possible for him to be dragged down by the unrealities of this world. So long as man is conscious only of his little self, he will be self-conceited; but let him come under the dominion of the Great Self and at once his consciousness will expand and carry him beyond the limits of selfish thought

and action. We cannot expect this higher state of understanding, however, to come upon us suddenly; but its unfoldment is only possible as the result of careful and deliberate preparation.

There can be little question that Emerson was strongly imbued with the spirit of the Upanishads when he wrote his essay on the *Over-Soul*. The title itself indicates it, for "Over-Soul" is almost a literal translation of the Sanskrit word *Param-Atman* (Supreme Self.) The very expressions, as well as the thought contained in the essay, are all akin to those found in the Indo-Aryan Scriptures. But this does not imply that they were borrowed. Emerson undoubtedly drew his inspiration from the Vedas; yet it was his own spiritual genius which enabled him to grasp the lofty ideals they proclaim, and give them out with such masterful power. When great men study the Scriptures of the world, it does

not unsettle their understanding or rob them of their own true faith, but it makes them see the universality of Truth and leads them to unite all the varying expressions of Truth into one great whole. Whenever spiritual seeking becomes an all-absorbing passion of our soul, we are inevitably released from all doctrinal and creed-bound beliefs and are brought face to face with the great cosmic, universal and all-abiding Truth.

IV

EMERSON AND HINDU CLASSICS

THE value of comparative study is unmistakable. Every sincere seeker after Truth recognizes the great stimulus it exerts over the mind, and welcomes with joyous heart every revelation that is sustained and verified by many sources both old and new. The dogmatist, on the other hand, in order to safeguard his chosen creed, sits with doors closed to both past and present.

We forget that Truth is self-sufficient and self-sustaining and does not require human hand to protect it. Why should a precept of the New Testament be less valuable if it is found in the Old Testament, or again in the Jewish Kabala, or

in the Egyptian sacred codes, in the Zend Avesta of the Parsees, in the great Chinese classics, or in the Indo-Aryan Vedic revelation? Not only is the value of such a saying not decreased, it is reinforced a thousandfold and its utility is expanded. It is only when we settle down to religious morbidity that we are fearful of anything out of our usual custom or habit.

No one who has come in contact with the Indo-Aryan culture and its great classical treasures can help but recognize a profound kinship of thought between these and many of Emerson's writings and utterances. This is not merely a matter of inference; Emerson himself speaks of it frequently, as in his essay on "Worship" where he says: "We owe to the Hindu Scriptures a definition of Law which compares well with any in our Western books: 'Law it is, which is without name, or color, or hands, or feet; which is smallest of the

least, and largest of the large; all, and knowing all things; which hears without ears, sees without eyes, moves without feet, and seizes without hands.' ” This thought is a free rendering from a passage in the Upanishads.

Then again in the opening stanza of his poem “Brahma” we read:

“If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain thinks he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.”

Here he voices almost literally a verse from the Bhagavad-Gita: “He who considers this Self as a slayer or he who thinks that this Self is slain, neither of these knows the Truth. For It does not slay nor is It slain.”

His essay on “Immortality” he concludes with the story of Nachiketas from the Katha-Upanishad. We give it in his own words as he has retold it. “It is

curious to find the selfsame feeling, that it is not immortality, but eternity,—not duration, but a state of abandonment to the Highest, and so the sharing of His perfection,—appearing in the farthest east and west. The human mind takes no account of geography, language, or legends, but in all utters the same instinct.

“Yama, the lord of Death, promised Nachiketas, the son of Gautama, to grant him three boons at his own choice. Nachiketas, knowing that his father Gautama was offended with him, said, ‘O Death! let Gautama be appeased in mind, and forget his anger against me: this I choose for the first boon.’ Yama said, ‘Through my favor, Gautama will remember thee with love as before.’ For the second boon, Nachiketas asks that the fire by which heaven is gained be made known to him; which also Yama allows, and says, ‘Choose the third boon, O Nachiketas.’

“Nachiketas said, ‘There is this inquiry. Some say the soul exists after the death of man; others say it does not exist. This I should like to know, instructed by thee.’ Such is the third of the boons. Yama said, ‘For this question, it was inquired of old, even by the gods; for it is not easy to understand it. Subtle is its nature. Choose another boon, O Nachiketas! Do not compel me to this.’ Nachiketas said, ‘Even by the gods was it inquired. And as to what thou sayest, O Death, that it is not easy to understand it, there is no other teacher to be found like thee. There is no other boon like this.’

“Yama said, ‘Choose sons and grandsons who may live a hundred years; choose herds of cattle; choose elephants and gold and horses; choose the wide expanded earth, and live thyself as many years as thou listeth. Or, if thou knowest a boon like this, choose it, together with

wealth and far-extending life. Be a king, O Nachiketas! On the wide earth I will make thee the enjoyer of all desires. All those desires that are difficult to gain in the world of mortals, all those ask thou at thy pleasure;—those fair nymphs of heaven with their chariots, with their musical instruments; for the like of them are not to be gained by men. I will give them to thee, but do not ask the question of the state of the soul after death.' Nachiketas said, 'All those enjoyments are of yesterday. With thee remain thy horses and elephants, with thee the dance and song. If we should obtain wealth, we live only as long as thou pleasest. The boon which I choose I have said.'

"Yama said, 'One thing is good, another is pleasant. Blessed is he who takes the good, but he who chooses the pleasant loses the object of man. But thou, considering the objects of desire, hast abandoned them.

These two, ignorance (whose object is what is pleasant) and knowledge (whose object is what is good), are known to be far asunder, and to lead to different goals. Believing this world exists, and not the other, the careless youth is subject to my sway. That knowledge for which thou hast asked is not to be obtained by argument. I know worldly happiness is transient, for that firm one is not to be obtained by what is not firm. The wise, by means of the union of the intellect with the soul, thinking him whom it is hard to behold, leaves both grief and joy. Thee, O Nachiketas! I believe a house whose door is open to Brahma. Brahma the supreme, whoever knows Him obtains whatever he wishes. The soul is not born; it does not die; it was not produced from any one. Nor was any produced from it. Unborn, eternal, it is not slain, though the body is slain; subtler than what is subtle, greater than

what is great, sitting it goes far, sleeping it goes everywhere. Thinking the soul as unbodily among bodies, firm among fleeting things, the wise man casts off all grief. The soul cannot be gained by knowledge, not by understanding, not by manifold science. It can be obtained by the soul by which it is desired. It reveals its own truths.' ”

All this proves conclusively that Emerson was thoroughly imbued with the Vedic revelation and freely drew inspiration from its teaching. Again and again he acknowledges his debt to the ancients. After reviewing the mighty attainments of antique Greece and Rome, as well as those of ancient and mediaeval Europe, he adds in his essay on the “Progress of Culture”: “But if these works still survive and multiply, what shall we say of names more distant, or hidden through their very superiority to their coevals,—

names of men who have left remains that certify a height of genius in their several directions not since surpassed, and which men in proportion to their wisdom still cherish,—as Zoroaster, Confucius, and the grand Scriptures only recently known to Western nations, of the Indian Vedas, the Institutes of Manu, the Puranas, the poems of the Mahabarat and the Ramayana?"

Emerson was not the only one who came in contact with the Indo-Aryan culture and its thought; but he was one of those few who possessed sincerity of purpose, breadth of vision, and courage of conviction enough to recognize and acknowledge his debt to it. As I have already pointed out, in the higher realms of thought borrowing is neither possible nor practicable; but a harmonious blending of what is true and fundamental brings about a glorious fulfillment of high idealism. Man can

never hope to attain his spiritual grandeur until he is willing to partake of the blessings of others and share his own with un-biased heart.

"He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, he never turns away from the Self. He who perceives all beings as the Self, for him how can there be delusion or grief, when he sees this oneness everywhere?"

—ISA UPANISHAD.

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